

Save Foggy Bottom...It's Where We Live!

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FOGGY BOTTOM NEWS

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OPINION

How Did We Get Here? The Future of Square 54

By Ronald Cocome, FBA
Immediate Past President

Thus far, the story of Square 54 is not a happy one. Here's some of the history of how we got to where we are today.

Last year at about this time, when I was president of the FBA, I received a call from Ellen McCarthy, then Acting Executive Director of the Office of Planning. Ellen said she wanted to get the community involved in planning for the future use of the old George Washington University Hospital site on Square 54. Our subsequent discussions were candid and free ranging, even hopeful. Everyone wants a say in their own community issues.

By this time, though, GW was well under way with its own plans for Square 54. With no input from our community, the university had already decided on the use of the site and had hired developers and architects. With its substantive decisions already made, it announced plans for what we've seen in retrospect was the

public relations battle. It announced a series of "stakeholder meetings" to "hear from the community."

This, of course, is GW's usual game plan: make a decision then dress it up with orchestrated meetings after the fact, to provide needed window dressing for its presentation to the Zoning Commission on the square's future plans.

We immediately agreed on the importance of Square 54's development to the community and, certainly, to the university. Ellen said that this was the last chance we had to resolve our differences with GW, and graphically added that the community

must use GW's desire to develop the square as a "club." I said that this was likely to work only if the city supported our residential community and was assured that this would be so. I

The university is proposing a massive commercial development on Square 54 - with no university use whatever.

reminded her that GW's campus plan called for the use of the site to be used for student housing, necessary for compliance with the plan and for classroom space that the university claims it so badly needs. I also reminded her that GW was not in compliance with either its own campus plan or the city's comprehensive plan.

Ellen responded that, in her opinion, we could gain the most by engaging in direct negotiations with GW and the city, with the promised support of her office. It was agreed that such negotiations would include only the three parties: the university; the city, as represented by the city's Office of Planning; and the residential community, represented by the FBA and Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A.

We also agreed that a qualified campus planner must be included in the process, and well as a facilitator to mediate. We agreed that the three parties would meet to choose these professionals. Further, we agreed that the self-serving discussion panels of all "stakeholders" to formulate the residential community's position was a "scam" and would not go forward.

All of that agreed upon, the FBA hired and paid for legal counsel to

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Year in Review

A 'Full Plate' of Issues in Foggy Bottom

Foggy Bottom and the West End saw a year of continued change in 2005, experiencing some growing pains and having some signs of hope for the future as well.

In June, a new FBA Board of Directors was elected, with several new members arriving, some going, and a new president, Joy Howell, who replaced outgoing Ron Cocome. Dawn Gustafson and Treasurer Bob Vogt left the FBA, while Jim O'Leary and Russ Conlan

joined the Board, with Conlan assuming the Treasurer's post.

The saga of Square 54 continued to heat up, with George Washington University proposing a commercial development at the former hospital site, while the FBA made it clear it wants the school to use the land for student housing and other educational needs. (See Opinion piece, left.)

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A held a series of "informational" meetings on this subject of great importance to the neighborhood, and finally voted for a resolution at its Nov. 16 meeting opposing excessive commercial development on the now-barren square.

One of the big highlights for our neighborhood this year was the Foggy Bottom Farmer's Market, which started this summer and ran through late October. The market was made possible through the efforts of the FBA and Jackie Lemire in particular. Some of the vendors told the FBN in October it was one of their most successful - if not the most successful - open markets in the area, and that they were looking forward to coming

back next year. With a choice location near the Foggy Bottom metro at New Hampshire, I and 24th Sts., it's hard to imagine how any of our neighbors could have missed the Wednesday afternoon events, but if you did, that's where it will be next year!

Speaking of fresh produce, the FBA got the word in September that the Trader Joe's grocery store at the incoming Columbia condominiums at the old Columbia Hospital for Women site would be a go. This is certainly a much

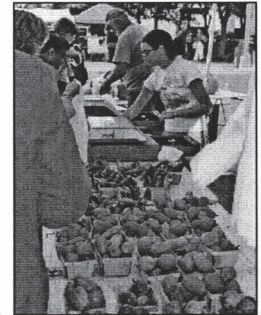


Making the Rounds: Councilmember Carol Schwartz (R-At Large), shown here at the FBA's October meeting, was one of several politicians who paid a visit to the FBA's general membership meetings this year. Photo: FBN

anticipated arrival for the neighborhood as well. And, like the Farmer's Market, it was made possible in part through the efforts of the FBA and the late Jeff Sherman, who spearheaded

that project with developer Trammel Crow through its inception. (Sherman, a good friend and partner of the FBA, passed away unexpectedly at the too-young age of 53 on Halloween.)

In the West End, residents and businesses alike continued to be



Farm Fresh: The Foggy Bottom Farmer's Market offered residents and visitors to our neighborhood alike a variety of fresh produce and other treats. Photo: FBN

concerned about the dearth of parking and excessive construction in their neighborhood and are looking forward to the return of most, if not all, the spots they have lost in past two years due to the construction surrounding the Columbia and its two companion developments, the Atlas and the Sovereign.

Meanwhile, a steady stream of local dignitaries continued to grace the FBA general membership meetings with their insight on local political and cultural issues this year. There was no lack of political talent, with D.C. Mayoral hopeful Adrian Fenty (D-Ward 4) speaking at the FBA's well-attended annual

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Reader Letters, Ideas Welcome!

Your neighborhood, your paper: The FBN welcomes readers' letters, thoughts and story ideas. Anything from "hard news" ideas to neighborhood-related poetry or cartoons! Submissions subject to editing or holding, as space requires.

E-mail: foggybottomnews@yahoo.com or see mailing address in masthead.

THE FOGGY BOTTOM NEWS

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The Foggy Bottom News is published by the Foggy Bottom Association as a service to its members and provides information on FBA and neighborhood news, programs, activities and other events of interest to FBA members. Contributions and story ideas are welcome, but the FBN reserves the right to edit or hold pieces as space requires.

The Foggy Bottom Association was formed by a group of citizens in 1955 and was formally incorporated in 1959. Attendance at FBA meetings is open to all residents of Foggy Bottom and the West End.

FBA Officers:

PRESIDENT - Joy Howell
VICE PRESIDENT - Barbara Spillinger
SECRETARY - Jill Nevius
TREASURER - Russell Conlan
MEMBERSHIP - Edward B. Gable Jr.

FBA Board of Directors:

Ellie Becker, Joseph G. Chaplick, Elizabeth B. Elliott, Jacqueline G. Lemire, Michael G. Malloy, James R. O'Leary, Ronald Cocome (Immediate Past President; Ex Officio)

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Year in Review

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meeting in June. Fenty spoke on everything from education and affordable housing to other matters that will be key issues in the coming election year.

Carol Schwartz (R-At Large) and Kathy Patterson (D-Ward 3) also spoke at FBA meetings, coming in this fall.

Schwartz gave a spirited defense of her position to allow some smoking in the city's bars and restaurants — since trumped by her colleagues, who recently passed a smoking ban that will take effect in most establishments by 2007 — while Patterson

spoke of one of her primary issues, public education in D.C.

The Great Whitehurst Freeway Debate — or debacle, depending on who you talk to — also heated up this year, with the D.C. Department of Transportation, a.k.a. D-DOT,

Square 54, the Whitehurst Freeway and the new Foggy Bottom Farmer's Market were among the year's highlights.

commissioning a nearly half-million dollar "feasibility study" on different "deconstruction" (read: tear-down) options for the roadway that lifts and separates tens

of thousands of cars a day from Georgetown neighborhoods. Many of our neighbors, in both Foggy Bottom and Georgetown, are opposed to tearing down the Whitehurst for the simple reason that there's just no place for all those



Peaches & Cream: A prospective buyer samples the goods at the Foggy Bottom Farmer's Market. Photo: FBN

cars to go. There may be other motives at work behind this push, and this will undoubtedly continue to be a major local issue in 2006, as D-DOT's consultants' various options receive more scrutiny.

All in all, definitely a "full plate" of issues for our neighborhood as we enter 2006. In the meantime, Happy New Year!

— MGM

OPINION

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prepare for these negotiations. After some preparation, the first meeting was scheduled to set the procedure for the negotiations. That same day, after instructions to all parties from the facilitator not to behave in any inflammatory behavior, the university issued a proposed schedule for the very public meetings circus the negotiations were designed to replace.

At that meeting GW was represented by its treasurer, Louis Katz, who was accompanied not by a campus planner, but instead by three staff property developers. The university's treasurer spent most of the meeting complaining that we were represented by a lawyer — yet, Katz is a lawyer himself. It was clear from the beginning that the university had no intention of participating in any negotiation with us. The city reneged on its commitments to us. GW went ahead with its own process. So here we are.

The university now proposes a massive commercial development on Square 54 — with no university use whatever. This development would have four buildings totaling nearly 900,000 square feet above ground space. The old hospital was some 550,000 square feet. By comparison, the development on the old convention site, downtown, is planned at about the same 900,000 square feet — on a

site with more than four times the land area.

The Board of Zoning Adjustment, responsible for enforcement of the campus plan, wrote that a 550,000 foot development on the square would solve all the mandated housing and the needed classroom space.

GW functions in our residential community as a guest. The city's comprehensive plan states that as such a special exception guest, it is to have no adverse effect on our community. As a part of its exceptional use rights under the campus plan, the university already has been given far more density than you or I would have had as a matter of right.

In its growth frenzy, the university has already used all of its extra density. But greed knows no limits.

What GW is now proposing, in order to maximize its land value, is the use of Square 54 exclusively for commercial purposes. To make up for its need for housing and classrooms, the university proposes that the District permit it to build some two million square feet elsewhere on the campus.

Among other questions, one might ask why two million square feet are needed to make up for 550,000 square feet? The answer is that this nonprofit corporation is

functioning as a land developer. Sadly, the educational purposes under which it benefits, as a non-profit, is only an excuse, not the reason for its existence. This behavior is costing the taxpayers of this city tens of millions of dollars year after year and growing — a very expensive scam on all of us.

The process regarding Square 54 itself has been a scam within a scam. The only input the community has had is helping to decide the use of

the ground floor retail space. None of the community concerns been reflected in the final plans; those plans have not fundamentally changed from inception. The process has been an event staged only to

give an appearance of legitimacy. At the request of the city, we were ready to enter into a formal negotiation process. The university chose not to do so and the city, having proposed the negotiation, left us high and dry.

Months before I was called by the Office of Planning, representatives of the FBA met with City Administrator Robert Bobb to discuss our relationship with GW. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Bobb turned to me and said, "All you are really asking is for the District to enforce its laws." That, indeed, is what we were asking for then — and what we will insist upon now.

GW functions in our residential community as a guest, and should have no adverse effect on our community.

SAVE THE DATES!

2006 FBA General Membership Meetings:

January 30

May 22

February 27

June 26 —

March 27

Annual meeting

April 24

Speakers TBA

All meetings at Melrose Hotel, 2430 Pennsylvania Ave. NW; subject to change.